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FACT v. FICTION.



FICTION.



FACT.

"The net losses of British shipping during the last six months have been one-half what the Germans claim them to be."—*Mr. Lloyd George.*

Mr. Lloyd George's Statement on Shipping and Food Supplies.

(HOUSE OF COMMONS,
Thursday, 16th August, 1917.)

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FACT V. FICTION.

Mr. Lloyd George's Statement on Shipping and Food Supplies.

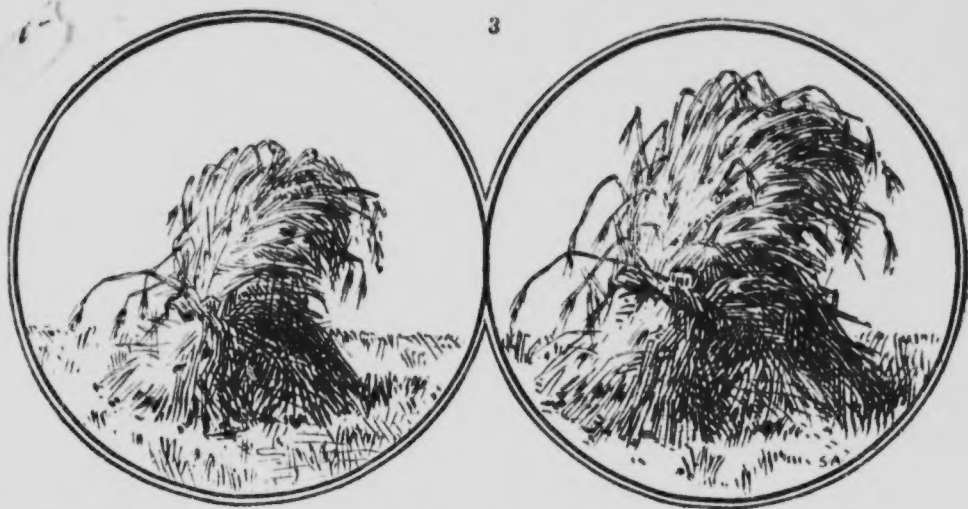
Not merely to inform the people of this country—but also for the information of neutrals and all others who may be concerned, I think it necessary that the facts of the case in regard to food and submarines should be placed before the country at the earliest possible opportunity.

This time last year the stocks of wheat in this country were 6,480,000 quarters. At the present moment there are 8,500,000 quarters of wheat. The stocks of wheat are 2,000,000 above those of the corresponding period of last year. The stocks of oats and barley are also higher than they were this time last year.

Speaking generally, owing to closer milling and to the food economy campaign there has been something saved which is equivalent to an addition of 70,000 quarters of wheat for the food supply of this country. That represents something like one-seventh of the total consumption of wheat. That is the position as far as stocks are concerned.

In December, 1916, the acreage of cultivation was down by something between 200,000 and 300,000 acres, as compared with the corresponding period of 1915. Now not merely has that deficiency been covered, but the area of cultivation is something like 1,000,000 acres above the acreage under cultivation last year. That represents oats, barley, potatoes, and wheat—something like an addition of between three and four million tons to the food supplies in this country.

If the harvest is as good as it promises to be now, and if the harvesting weather is not particularly unpropitious, the condition of this country in regard to food supplies is one which, taking everything into account, is very satisfactory. In fact, it is better than it has been for a good many years. I want here again to utter a word of warning. The harvests of the world, compared with previous years, are not good. On the whole, it looks as if the aggregate supply of food for human consumption



STOCKS OF WHEAT IN AUGUST 1916,
6,480,000 QUARTERS.

STOCKS OF WHEAT IN AUGUST 1917,
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will be considerably below the average. All that has to be taken into account when you are surveying the prospects of the provision of cereals between now and the harvest of 1918. I am saying that in order to urge the need of strict economy, the continued need, and even the greater need of strict economy, because we have to think not merely of the condition of things in this country, we have also to think of our Allies, France and Italy. (Cheers.) Neither here nor in any other respect must we think only of ourselves; let us also think of those gallant Frenchmen and of the brave Italians who have been obliged to abandon the plough in order to fight for the liberty of their own country at the frontier. The more we economise in this country the less will be the drain upon the reservoir of food which France, as well as Italy and ourselves, have got to draw upon in Canada, in the Argentine, and in America. I still urge that the gratifying response which the householders of this country made to the appeal of the Food Controller should be continued until the harvest of 1918, in order not merely to save tonnage for this country, but to save food supplies for this country, as well as for our Allies.

The sugar stocks were at the beginning of this year very low; they continued to be very low throughout the Spring. Since then there has been a very material improvement, and there is an increase in our reserves, so that for the moment we do not feel the anxiety which we all felt in the early Spring with regard to the sugar supplies.

With regard to 1918, steps are being taken to increase the area of cultivation for that year. In 1918 you will have millions more acres of land under cultivation, and that means millions more tons of food raised in this country, and will be free from any submarine menace which the enemy can possibly develop against us.

The War Office are assisting us to the best of their power, and the distinguished officer in command of the Home Forces is lending us every aid in his power, and I think we can confidently expect to be able to supply the necessary labour for the purpose of carrying through the operations which have been undertaken with regard to the cultivation of land in this country. In regard to tractors, apart altogether from those in private possession, we have been able to gather together something like a thousand; by October there will be 2,500, and by the Spring there will be 8,000 tractors.

The Government have come to the conclusion that, with reasonable economy, there is no chance for starving out the population of these islands.

I come to the shipping situation. Here the Germans have been very busy for their own purpose circulating statements and figures with regard to the destruction effected by their submarine campaign. They have circulated them in their own country and in Austria, and they are circulating them in neutral countries, and even in countries which are allied to our own. They are doing it in their country to cheer up their own people. There is no doubt at all that they had given a very definite promise that, by the month of August, the submarine campaign would have effected such ravages on our mercantile marine that England, as they put it, would be out of the war. There was a definite promise to that effect given in the German Reichstag. Now they find that that is not true, and there is a corresponding sense of discouragement in their own country, and that has spread to other countries. The Germans are now preparing a set of figures, which they call official, on the authority of the Admiralty; they are circulating these figures throughout Germany and throughout Austria, figures as to the losses inflicted upon British shipping. The reason in their own country is quite clear. So is the purpose in other countries. There is no doubt that the pressure of the war is very great upon their population, and the pressure is great upon the populations which are allied to Germany. They



ACREAGE UNDER CULTIVATION IN
DECEMBER 1916.

ACREAGE UNDER CULTIVATION TO-DAY.

want to create the impression that in a very short time the damage inflicted upon our mercantile marine will be so great that we cannot last much longer, and the moment Great Britain is out of the war their view is that the whole of the alliance will collapse.

The unrestricted submarine campaign began in February. There is an enormous advantage from the point of view of the assailant in being able to hit your ship without having to ask any questions as to the flag she carries or as to the cargo she carries. If they fire a torpedo at anything that appears on the surface, then undoubtedly their chances of doing injury to shipping tonnage is twice, at any rate, as great as it would be when they had to hesitate and to consider whether that was an American ship, whether that was a Dutch ship, or whether she by any chance could be a British ship, because it has got to be done instantaneously if it is done effectively. The moment the Germans came to the conclusion that they would destroy every ship that appeared on the surface of the deep, then the losses increased, so that by the month of April we lost about 560,000 tons of shipping in a single month.

The German official figures claim that we are losing between 450,000 tons and 500,000 tons net, that is, that after deducting the ships which we build every month our losses are 450,000 to 500,000 net. Now I give the worst month, and I begin with April. The 560,000 was gross, not net. Now came the Admiralty methods of dealing with the situation. There were several means which they devised of dealing with a very perilous situation, but they all had the effect of first of all giving more

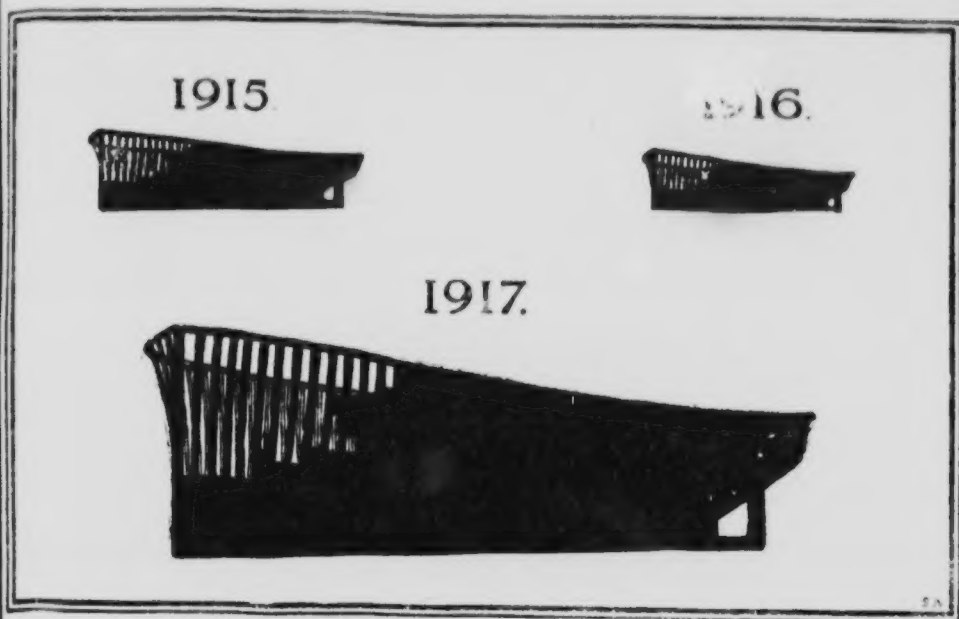
protection to our ships and of making it more dangerous for the submarine to ply its tyrannical trade. The result has been that the losses, which were in April 550,000 tons, in July came down to 320,000, which is a very considerable reduction. These are the figures without deducting the tonnage which we have built.

The net losses, which, according to the Germans, are 450,000 to 500,000 tons a month—our net losses during the last six months, that is, since the beginning of the unrestricted submarine campaign, so far from being 450,000 to 500,000 tons, are under 250,000 tons per month.

If the August figures continue at the same ratio of loss as we have experienced during the first fortnight, then our net losses during the months of July and August would be at the rate of 175,000 tons a month. That is, taking the whole of the six months we have only lost half what the Germans claim. At the present rate we are only losing one-third of what the Germans claim. That is a very serious difference, and I should like to point this out. *The losses are diminishing, the building is increasing.*

With regard to the methods adopted by the Admiralty, without going into them in detail—for it would be obviously unwise that I should do so—the figures indicate that they are meeting with considerable success in their endeavours to deal with submarines, and the measure of their success is all the more conspicuous when it is borne in mind that the number of the submarines is increasing. In spite of that fact the losses inflicted by them are diminishing, and have diminished very considerably as compared with three or four months ago.

Now I come to other methods for countering the submarine menace. The Shipping Controller has succeeded in first of all so re-organising the shipping of this country by means of better loading, by taking ships off longer voyages and concentrating them on shorter voyages, by turning ships round more quickly so that they should be able to make more voyages in the course of the year. He has been able by that means to secure that, although we have a diminished tonnage, we have been able to carry more tons. Our shipping in June and July of this year, compared with June and July of last year, is something like 10 per cent. down, and as there is no diminution in the tonnage which is devoted to the carriage of Government material for our armies abroad, that means that the diminution in the tonnage available for ordinary imports



NEW SHIP-BUILDING IN 1915	688,000 tons.
" " IN 1916	538,000 "
" " IN 1917	1,904,000 "

is down not by 10 per cent., but by 20 per cent. In spite of that fact we succeeded in carrying during the period which I have indicated, 150,000 more tons in British ships to the United Kingdom.

In addition to that, the Shipping Controller has taken steps for the quickening of ship-building.

In 1915 the tonnage built in this country was 688,000. The tonnage built in this country during peace times is, I think, on an average something a little under 2,000,000. In 1915 the ship-building came to 688,000 tons. In 1916 it was 538,000 tons. In the first six months of this year it was 484,000 tons; but in the second six months of this year—this will include some purchased abroad—the new shipping acquired by this country will be 1,420,000 tons in six months. A little over a million tons, nearly 1,100,000 tons, will be built in this country and 330,000 tons will be acquired abroad, so that this year the tonnage which we shall acquire will be 1,900,000. This is purely mercantile marine. Bear in mind the condition under which the tonnage is built. It is the fourth year of the war. There is a difficulty in labour, and most difficulty in material. You require steel for guns and shells for the Navy, because

the ship-building programme of the Navy has gone up considerably in the course of the present year. In spite of that fact the ship-building of the country in this year will not be very far from what it was in the days of peace. I think that is a very fine achievement. (Cheers.)

In addition to that there is a very considerable programme of additional naval construction, which has been laid down this year. The tonnage of the naval construction this year will go up by hundreds of thousands of tons. This shows what this country is capable of when it is put to the test. The House of Commons and the people of this country and the people of Allied countries—yea, and the people of Germany—will now know what value to attach to this figure of from 450,000 to 500,000 tons per month loss of British shipping.

Even now we have not got enough tonnage for all essential purposes. We have got to provide tonnage for France, Italy, and Russia, as well as for ourselves, and we need more ships instead of fewer ships. And I am not going to pretend that there will not be at best a rate of diminution of our shipping, which will embarrass us in the struggle, and therefore it is essential, not merely that this country should build, but that the only other countries which have a great ship-building capacity should also build. If the United States of America puts forth the whole of her capacity, and I have no doubt, from what I hear, that she is preparing to do it in her own thorough and enterprising way, I have no doubt at all that we shall have sufficient tonnage not merely for this year—but for the whole of 1918 and, if necessary, for 1919 as well, because America can expand very considerably her ship-building capacity if the real need ever arises for her to do so.

Looking ahead, our difficulties will diminish, our power will increase; our enemies' difficulties will increase, their power will diminish, and they know it. It is for that reason I say this is the supreme hour for patience, for courage, for endurance, for hope, and for unity. Let us go through this hour with the same temper and impetus that enabled us to destroy the great military despotism at the beginning of the nineteenth century, standing often alone but saving Europe. Let us go through this hour now with the old temper of our race, and next year we shall begin, and the world will begin, to reap the fruits of our valour. (Loud cheers.)

